

# Common Hardwood Management Mistakes

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Sometimes misguided by traditions of the past or the lack of adequate science-based information, forest landowners make mistakes with regard to their hardwood forest management. What seems logical at first, once implemented, could prove problematic, particularly if such mistakes are repeated through the generations. Based on observations made while assisting and advising private forest landowners, there are a number of common errors made repeatedly that are addressed here.

**Maintaining a closed canopy through a selection harvest is always good forestry.** Single tree selection is one silvicultural method of harvesting. It has application, particularly for those landowners who rank aesthetics and recreation high on their ownership objectives. It can be used in combination to thin younger stands or remove undesirable trees, particularly when overcoming mistakes of the past. However, most hardwood forests – if managed for quality timber production – at some point should undergo a heavier stand regenerating harvest (even if only applied in small patches). This allows adequate sunlight to reach the forest floor, stimulating new growth. By not periodically regenerating a forest, the composition and quality will change over time.

**A stand marked with paint means responsible forestry is being practiced.** This depends. Under what parameters were the trees chosen for harvest? If tree size, species, or value were the only considerations, then responsible forest management was likely not practiced. Harvesting only these types of trees will leave a residual stand, poor in quality or low in value. Instead, harvest consideration should also be given to include the “D” trees: dwarfed, dying, diseased, damaged, deformed, defective, and undesirable. This is the necessary part of

weeding the stand and eliminating unwanted seed sources.

**The forest soil will take care of itself.** Don’t be so sure. We tend to think of fallen and decomposing leaves and twigs as soil in the making, rather than the organic matter and nutrient recycling they are. True soil is derived from weathering of subsoil rocks, from wind-blown particles that escaped from distant places, or from alluvial sediment deposited after transport via water. All are processes that can take centuries to occur. Stresses that are placed on forest soils during logging are normally restricted to skidding lanes, hauling roads, log landing areas, and

stream crossings. Concerted effort should be made to protect soil in these areas and thereby assure protection of the water resources. Landowners should understand and follow accepted best management practices (BMPs).

**Harvest timber only when you need the money.** Saving timber as a security to hedge against off-years of other sources of income is not always advisable. Trees are a crop. Though somewhat unique in that they can be retained on the stump for years, doing so could sacrifice considerable production and income. Annual growth rate and return on forest investment peaks, then declines.

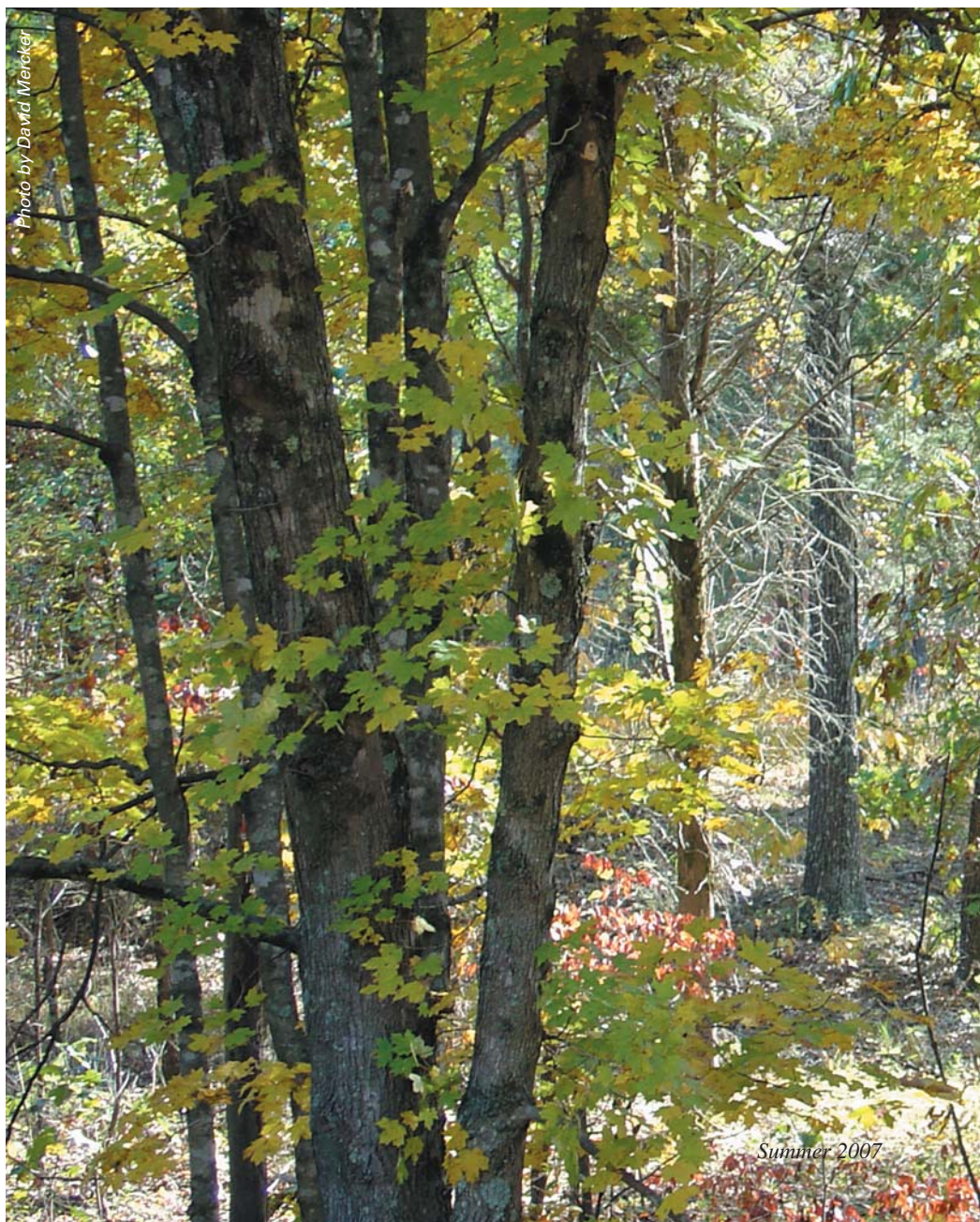


Photo by David Mercker

*Private landowners should seek the assistance of professional foresters when considering their forest and wildlife management options in hardwood forests.*



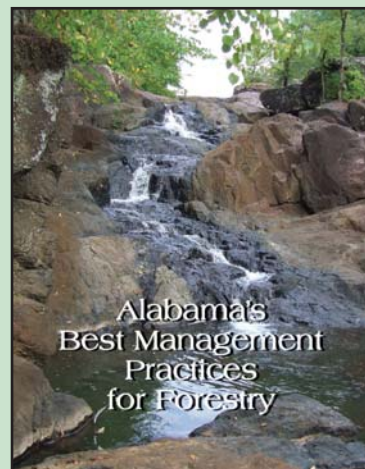
Harvesting timber crops at or near the peak, then converting those funds to a more favorable alternative investment is a more prudent decision. Also, it is wise to track timber markets. Waiting to sell timber when other sources of income are lower may miss the optimum market.

**This has always been the “assumed” property boundary.** Landowners beware! The penalty for timber trespass can be very high. Be certain of property boundaries. Study the deed, reach agreement with your neighbors, and seek assistance from a professional forester or surveyor.

**Small trees will grow to become big trees.** Some will, and some won't. If a tree has for too long been suppressed by growing in the understory of larger trees, it will not likely release and grow vigorously once the taller tree(s) are removed.

**Knots on the trunk of a tree will cover up and make fine lumber.** This depends. On younger, vigorously growing hardwood trees, knots often become concealed and produce quality lumber, particularly if the knots are small-sized. However, large knots or knots formed on slow growing, decadent trees may heal superficially, but never produce clear lumber.

**I can handle this on my own.** The opportunity to sell timber is infrequent for most landowners, and achieving proficiency is difficult (and usually forgotten between sales). Therefore, it is always advisable to first see a forester, and perhaps several. Not only is a forester's professional expertise needed, but foresters have knowledge of current cost-share programs, laws/regulations/taxes, etc. This expertise can save you money, make you money, or preserve your money. 🏠



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**Updated BMP Manuals  
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The Alabama Forestry Commission, with the approval of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, has updated ***Alabama's Best Management Practices for Forestry***. New illustrative photos and diagrams have replaced older ones in order to revitalize this document. However, the content of the document has not changed, in order to maintain the standard of environmental quality that has helped the Forestry Commission achieve and maintain its positive reputation in the environmental community.

Contact your local Alabama Forestry Commission office or call the AFC's state headquarters at (334) 240-9365.

